

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
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INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY ACCRA
AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMCONSUL IBADAN
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0740

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS, DM
SUBJ: BENIN'S REVOLUTION: KEREKOU STRENGTHENS MILITARY ROLE
IN FACE OF PUBLIC DISCONTENT

SUMMARY: BENINESE PRESIDENT KEREKOU HAS INCREASED POWER OF
MILITARY AT EXPENSE OF CIVILIAN REVOLUTIONARY STRUCTURES, GIVING
MILITARY AUTHORITY TO "LIQUIDATE ON THE SPOT" BLACK MARKETEERS
ALLEGEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR CORN SHORTAGE. PUBLIC DISGRUNTLEMENT
OVER GOVERNMENT POLICIES GREATEST SINCE 1975 AND COULD FORCE
KEREKOU TAKE EVEN HARSHER INTERNAL SECURITY MEASURES.
END SUMMARY.

1. IN AN IMPROVISED SPEECH APRIL 14 FOLLOWING COMMENCEMENT
ADDRESS TO NEW GROUP OF PARA-COMMANDOS, PRESIDENT KEREKOU
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ANNOUNCED THAT POWER OF BENINESE MILITARY WAS BEING INCREASED
AT EXPENSE OF CIVILIAN REVOLUTIONARIES. SPEAKING EMOTINONALLY
AND APPARENTLY IN REACTION TO SIGNS OF PUBLIC DISCONTENT OVER
SERIOUS CORN SHORTAGE, KEREKOU ABOLISHED REVOLUTIONARY TRIBUNALS
AND GAVE MILITARY FULL LICENSE TO "LIQUIDATE ON THE SPOT" THE
"COMMERANTS VEREUX" (SHADY BUSINESSMEN) WHOM HE BLAMED FOR THE
CORN CRISIS. THE COMMERANTS VEREUX, WHO IN THE FALL OF 1976

HAD BEEN ACCUSED OF ARTIFICALLY CREATING A MAIZE SHORTAGE THROUGH HOARDING AND BLACK MARKETING, HAD DISSAPPEARED FROM THE SCENE BY DECEMBER 31, AND WERE THEN EXLIPSED BY THE MERCENARY ATTACK. IN HIS ADDRESS KEREKOU RESURRECTED THEM AS THE "AVANT GARDE OF INTERNATIONAL IMPERIALISM AND FORWARD OBSERVERS FOR THE MERCENARIES."

2. KEREKOU ALSO USED OCCASION TO ATTACK "INTELLECTUAL REVOLUTIONARIES AND SO-CALLED CIVIL SERVANTS" FOR THEIR FAILURE TO CARRY OUT THE REVOLUTION EFFECTIVELY. HE REMINDED ASSEMBLED SOLDIERS THAT IT WAS THE ARMY THAT BEGAN THE REVOLUTION AND THAT ARMY COULD NOT ABANDON ITS RESPONSIBILITY TO STRUCTURES CREATED.

3. COMMENT: KEREKOU'S STRENGTHENING OF POWER OF THE MILITARY AND HIS ORDERS TO LIQUIDATE THE COMMERCE VIREUX APPEARS TO HAVE TWO AIMS: (A) TO ENSURE LOYALTY FROM A MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT OF WHICH OFFICER CORPS HAS BEEN DEMORALIZED AND WEAKENED UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE CIVILIAN IDEOLOGUES IN THE PARTY'S POLITICAL BUREAU, (B) TO WARN THE PUBLIC THAT HE IS PREPARED TO DEAL HARSHLY WITH ANY ATTEMPT TO USE THE FOOD SHORTAGE TO DISCREDIT HIS REGIME. HE MAY FEEL THAT HE WILL NEED AS MUCH MILITARY SUPPORT AS POSSIBLE IN THE EVENT THAT DEMONSTRATIONS BREAK OUT OVER THE CORN SHORTAGE.

4. HE HAS GENUINE CAUSE FOR CONCERN ON THIS SCORE SINCE FOR FIRST TIME SINCE 1975 ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY SENTIMENTS HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY VENTED. ON THE NIGHTS OF APRIL 14 AND 15 ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY SLOGANS AND POSTERS WERE PLACED ON PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND STREETS, INCLUDING THOSE IN DIRECT VICINITY OF PRESIDENTIAL

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DENTIAL PALACE AND INTERIOR MINISTRY. SLOGANS WHICH WERE ERASED AS SOON AS THEY WERE DISCOVERED APPARENTLY SAID "DOWN WITH THE REVOLUTION, THE DAHOMEAN PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY;" "DOWN WITH KEREKOU;" "WE WANT FOOD NOT REVOLUTION," ETC. GOVERNMENT REACTION HAS BEEN SWIFT. GUARDS ON DUTY AT THE PRESIDENCY AND INTERIOR MINISTRY HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. NIGHT PATROLS HAVE BEEN INSTITUTED AND REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEES HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO BE ON GUARD FOR "PHANTOM CHALKER".

5. THERE HAS BEEN ANTI-GOVERNMENT SENTIMENT ELSEWHERE IN BENIN AS WELL. IN PARAKOU PUBLIC CRITICISM OF REVOLUTIONARY ADDRESS BY LOCAL DISTRICT CHIEF LED TO VISIT BY INTERIOR MINISTER AZONHIHO TO STRAIGHTEN OUT DIFFICULTIES. IN ABOMEY, WHICH AS THE CENTER OF THE FON KINGDOM HAS A REPUTATION FOR BEING ANTI-REVOLUTIONARY, SPECIAL MEETINGS WERE HELD WEEKEND OF APRIL 16 AND 17 TO "DECIDE ON NEW SOCIO-ECONOMIC POLICIES" FOR THE DISTRICT. THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS OF CIVIL SERVANTS AND TEACHERS LEAVING COUNTRY IN SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS. IF THIS IS TRUE, A BUREAUCRACY ALREADY NEARLY PARALYZED BY IDEO-

LOGICAL INDOCTRINATION SESSIONS AND "STATE OF EMERGENCY" WILL
BECOME TOTALLY INEFFECTIVE AS IT FURTHER IS DRAINED OF ITS
TECHNICAL MANPOWER.

6. WHILE IT IS UNLIKELY THAT PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY ENOUGH AT THIS
MOMENT TO RISK BEING MOWED DOWN BY AK-47'S, ANTI-GOVERNMENT
SENTIMENT AND PUBLIC CYNICISM ARE CERTAINLY GREATER NOW THAN
AT ANY TIME SINCE THE 1975 DEMONSTRATIONS OVER MURDER OF INTERIOR
MINISTER AIKPE. IF THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT PROVIDE FOOD OR THE
EFFECTIVE PROMISE OF FOOD (I.E. PROSPECTS FOR A GOOD HARVEST)
WITHIN THE NEXT THREE MONTHS, IT MAY HAVE TO TAKE EVEN HARSHER
INTERNAL SECURITY MEASURES IF IT WISHES TO FORESTALL SERIOUS
OUTBREAKS OF PUBLIC VIOLENCE.
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